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My Grandfather's Old Coat.

A POLITICAL ALLEGORY.

My grandfather was a man of many virtues. I am very proud of his memory. He was somewhat peculiar, but nevertheless so full of goodness and love, that many people were very much attached to him. He had his enemies, however, and very bitter ones, too, some of them were. He was, as it is sometimes said, the soul of honor; and humanitarianism was strong in him. What wonder, then, that his nature was brought in conflict with many who could stoop to any meanness; and before whom another human being counts as nothing, if chancing to stand in their way! Against such, his anger was terrible; but to the poor and needy, he was always gentle as a dove.

I think I see him now, as I first remember him in the prime of his life. Of full form and commanding stature; eyes that gleamed like lightning when he was aroused, or melted in tenderness when one appealed to him for protection. I remember an occasion which called out a full display of both sides of his nature. His farm joined to that of a very aristocratic gentleman, between whom and my grandfather there existed, for a long time, very peaceable and even friendly relations. They used frequently to meet at the line-fence and discuss their crops, cattle, the markets, and politics; and sometimes met in each other's houses and talked of religion, law, and social progress. They were members of the same church, but attended two different meetings; as one drove south to Knechtschaft and the other to the north to Vorrecht. The services in these two churches of the same denomination, especially the preaching, was quite different; so

marked, that neither my grandfather nor his neighbor would have attended the other church on any account. My grandfather was a working man, and did not hesitate to go into the field and assist his hired men in any of the operations which were carried on, on the farm. His neighbor, on the contrary, whose name was Wutherick, considered it degrading for him to work; and had managed to get a number of men and women into his power, whom he compelled to perform all his labor for him. Over these he sometimes condescended to watch while they were at their work; and if they did not delve with sufficient vigor, or if they displeased him in any way—which often occurred, as he was very exacting—he would go off in a great rage and abuse them very shamefully. More often, however, he left them to the care of an overseer more disposed to be cruel than himself; and this wretch would lead his workmen and women—for he had women who worked in the field also—a very sad life indeed. Many of these poor creatures would have been glad to get away from the service of such a man; but he held them by virtue of some very outrageous laws, and they were forced to stay and endure all his abuse and cruelty the best way they could. If I was to write pages and pages, I could not begin to tell about all the bad things that Mr. Wutherich did; and if I could, you would scarcely believe me, they were so very dreadful. And yet he was a member in good standing in the church where he attended; and had many friends in the neighborhood, who, because he was rich were glad to court his favor and shut their eyes to all his wicked ways. He was particularly noted for his hospitality, and gave excellent dinners, and invited everybody to come to his house and help eat his good things and drink his wine, which, as he never paid his workmen anything, was not so very wonderful after all. Many a man could afford to be generous, if he could only employ other people's property with which to entertain his friends. My grandfather would never go to any of these entertainments, however; or at least he very soon refused to do so. He may have gone once or twice, before he knew or thought how bad a man Mr. Wutherich was;

but after he began to realize how matters went, he said, "He had as soon turn cannibal at once, as to eat at his table; for it amounted to nothing else than dining off the flesh and blood of his poor people." Still, as a great many people were not so conscientious, my grandfather's neighbor had no trouble in finding plenty who would partake of his fare; and wonderfully jolly times they used to think they had of it. Sometimes my grandfather would expostulate with them about the impropriety of keeping company with such a man; but they generally laughed a little or replied: "Well now, Mr. Freiheit, you greatly misjudge our neighbor, Mr. Wutherich. Really now, he is not so bad a fellow as you think." But my grandfather was not to be deceived by such language, and rightly concluded that these people cared more for good dinners and the approbation of Mr. Wutherich—mean as he was—because he was rich, than they cared for the truth, or for the good of the poor creatures who were constantly defrauded, in order to supply all the good things which they enjoyed.

Sometimes my grandfather would stop in his work and look across the fields over into Mr. Wutherich's farm, where the poor people were at work; and sometimes when he saw the overseer knock a poor fellow down or strike a woman with a heavy stick, as he often did, he would drop his hoe or rake, or whatever he had, and clutch his fist and grit his teeth and vow he would go over and thrash the fellow on the spot. But his prudence generally got the better of his passion by the time he reached the line-fence, and then he would walk sadly and slowly back, and resume his work, stopping occasionally to wipe something out of his eye in order to take another look across the fences.

At last he became so burdened with the course of Mr. Wutherich, that he resolved to open his mind to him; and accordingly he embraced the first opportunity when they were both near the line-fence to expostulate with him on the iniquity of his conduct. I expect my grandfather expressed himself in rather strong terms. That was his way when he felt deeply; but you should have seen the passion into which Mr. W. flew at once, if you really want to

know how contemptible he was; and heard the shocking oaths he swore at my grandfather, and the threats with which he sought to intimidate him if he ever dared to say anything like that again.

But instead of frightening my grandfather, he only woke him up, and he gave him back again as good as he sent, with a pretty thick mixture of good, strong, moral swearing like "by the Eternal," and such; and let him know that he was his peer any day, and always was, and that he was not going to stand by any longer and see his abominable villainy, and not publicly protest against it. And, furthermore, he would take measures immediately to have his atrocious conduct investigated and stopped, and the men and women whom he had so long cheated and abused should have their rights as sure as there was a God in heaven! And much more of the same sort. A few days after this, one of Mr. Wutherich's men, named Fluchtig, came over to my grandfather's, and besought him to take him in, as Mr. W—— had threatened to kill him, and, when he started to run, had set the dogs after him, and chased him with a gun, and shot at him, so that he was already half-scared to death. My grandfather never hesitated a moment, but opened the door to him; and then he took down an old gun that hung on the wall, and says to Fluchtig, "Can you shoot?"

The poor fellow's teeth were chattering with fear but a moment before; but my grandfather's manner braced him up a good deal, and he answered, "Ya—yes, I can try."

"Well, then," said my grandfather, "take this, and if"—I guess we had better skip what he called him—"dares to touch you, blow his head off, that's all!" And then he coolly planted himself in his doorway with another gun handy, but kept out of sight, and waited for Mr. Wutherich to appear.

Pretty soon he rode up on horseback, and demanded to know if Fluchtig had been seen about my grandfather's premises, as he felt sure he had taken refuge there; and if so, he wanted him immediately.

My grandfather replied that he had been seen there, and that,

moreover, he was at that moment inside the house, and if Mr. W—— wanted him very badly, he had better come in and take him. But, as he said this, there was a look on his face that was very disagreeable to Mr. Wutherich, and he ran his eye over my grandfather's stout limbs, as much as to say, "I wonder if I could thrash him if I should try." If that is really what he thought, he seemed to decide in the negative; for, after swearing a good deal, and threatening very much, and reasoning very little, he finally rode away in a great rage, and vowing no end of vengeance.

Before he went, however, a large number of the neighbors had collected about the house, some of whom sided evidently with my grandfather, but more with Mr. Wutherich; and these encouraged him to take the fellow, telling him that they would stand by him and give old Freiheit fits. There was one man particularly, by the name of Rauber, with a bald head, a squint eye, and a very brazen face, who distinguished himself on that occasion by much loud talking; but who was an arrant coward, and took care not to say anything very definite. As soon as Mr. Wutherich rode away, he came up to my grandfather, and protested admiration for his conduct, because then our friends were hooting after the rascal and calling him names, and the others were slinking away.

You think I am a long while in getting to the point of my story, which is to be about my grandfather's coat; but have a little patience, and you shall hear it all before I am done: and it has much to do with this same Rauber's subsequent conduct. My grandfather had despised this man, as he had been more willing than any one else to excuse Mr. Wutherich's rascality and partake of his hospitality; but now his words were so apparently sincere, that he did not know but that the fellow had really seen a new light, and so took him by the hand in a frank and manly way.

Among the other threats in which Mr. Wutherich indulged, he vowed he would burn my grandfather's house and barn, and de-

stroy his fences, and kill his stock, and generally transform his fertile farm into a howling wilderness; and utterly clean him out—bag and baggage, and all that he had—with an extraordinarily complete thrashing to finish off with.

If he had ever carried out all he said he would do, I am afraid I should not have been left to tell this tale; and that he did not do it, is no fault of his, for I must do him the credit to say that he tried very hard to accomplish it all, and some people say that he very nearly succeeded. However that may be, we were awakened one fine morning by a great noise, and jumped out of bed to see what was the matter, only to find the devilish fellow really trying to carry out his threats. We had not fully believed that he would be as bad as his word, and were wholly unprepared to resist him. But the way my grandfather went for that villain then was refreshing, I can tell you. Mr. Wutherich had evidently tampered with some of my grandfather's hired men, and calculated very much on their assistance; and some of them did throw down the fences and go over to Mr. Wutherich's side, carrying with them whatever they could conveniently take along; but the most of them, to their lasting honor, stood stoutly by him, while a few evidently waited to see how the scrimmage was to terminate before they declared an open allegiance to either side. Immediately, almost, the neighbors began to collect, and many of them came fully prepared to give, at least, their moral support to Mr. Wutherich, as my grandfather was considered a peculiar fellow, who could not somehow appreciate "a good thing," and it would be just as well to have him out of the way.

But he displayed so much vigor in the very beginning of the fight, that these "policy fellows" began to shake their heads, and one by one they came and stood over on my grandfather's side. Not, indeed, doing much except a good deal of loud talking; and when Mr. Wutherich began to get the worst of it very much, they thought it was almost too bad to whip the fellow so dreadfully.

But, among them all, none were so contemptible as that man Rauber, who sat upon the line-fence, doing nothing and saying nothing, until it was perfectly clear to him that my grandfather was sure to whip Wutherich out of his boots; and then he climbed down and came around near the combatants, on my grandfather's side, and howled and tore around, so that if you had just come up, you would have thought that that was his exclusive affair. It is hardly necessary to enter into full particulars of that gallant fight; but of course my grandfather won a signal victory. And it was a thing to be proud of, too, for Wutherich did fight like a hero, and, as I used to think, only as men can who contend for a good cause; so that he proved a very worthy antagonist, and very nearly a match for my grandfather.

But when he was compelled to surrender, he did it like a man, and acknowledged that my grandfather was the stronger, and perhaps, also, wiser and better; and promised to give up a great many of his evil practices, and to quit abusing his poor people, and to pay them their wages regularly. On the whole, he began to behave himself with so much decency, and show so much manliness, that my grandfather quite forgot that he had just been giving him an awful drubbing, and reached out his hand to him, and said, "Now let us be friends again;" and Wutherich took it cordially, and I really believe he respected my grandfather more that day than he had ever done before in his life.

Well, now I come to the point of my story. My grandfather had, for several years, worn a very peculiar sort of coat, made of wool of the natural color, just as it came from the sheep's back; for, he said, he knew where that came from, and that no unpaid labor had helped to make it. People often laughed at him for his peculiarity, and pointed at him as he passed along the street; and some bad boys had been set on by older people, who would have been ashamed to do it themselves, to throw mud on him. But he wore that coat as a "testimony," he said, "against the pride and cruelty of the world;" and of course wherever he went, that coat spoke as loud as any man could directly to the con-

sciences of many wicked people, and that made them hate the very sight or name of it. This was particularly the case with Mr. Wutherich and all his friends; but after my grandfather's victory over him and them, that coat became wonderfully popular, and very many who had scoffed at it before, made haste to get one just as near like it as they could. Many of them cut a queer figure, clad in such a new harness; but they all pretended to like it very much, and seemed to imagine that to put on a coat like my grandfather's would make people believe that they were in all respects just like him. He was immensely popular now, and no mistake.

Among all who did as I have described, no one made more display of it than this man Rauber; and to have heard him talk, you would have supposed that it was principally he who whipped Wutherich, and compelled him to be a more respectable gentleman. He was always talking about the fight, as if it was a great and sufficient virtue to have been in it and whipped Wutherich; and that after having done that, it did not matter much what sort of a life a man led in this world, as he was sure of the respect of his fellow-citizens and eternal felicity hereafter for that one deed. To be sure, he did not have much part in the fight, but did he not wear my grandfather's coat, and had not my grandfather done the greatest and noblest things imaginable; and was he not, all things considered, about the most wonderful man that had ever lived or could be born? Of course he was, and *ergo*, he—Rauber—for he wore his coat, was certainly entitled to honor and confidence. The amount of honor that that man heaped upon himself in consequence of his part in that affair, and the self-conceit that he exhibited on account of wearing a bit of apparel similar to my grandfather, would have been sufficient to supply a state. It was perfectly ridiculous! But the worst is yet to come. By constantly prating about the matter, Rauber did finally succeed in making a good many people believe that he was a man of some merit. Let any fool persistently tell the world that he is wise, and he will be sure to find a multitude to accept his word;

and let any rascal constantly assert that he is a pattern of morality, and he shall not want ardent believers. And so it came about that he was chosen to fill a very responsible position in the neighborhood, and honored and trusted for my grandfather's sake, who was now becoming an old man, but who yet was full of love and truth, and would have scorned to do a mean or disgraceful act. Others among those who had likewise donned the peculiar coat, pressed forward into public notice; and my grandfather began to feel very uneasy, with his honor, as it were, in the keeping of so many new and untried men. "These men," he said, "who wear my coat and profess my principles, where were they during the years of my patient endurance of the world's scoffs? Some of them, it is true, were always my friends; but many of them, and the loudest mouthed among them, too, were either tacit or positive enemies to me." And then my grandfather Freiheit would shake his head gloomily, and heave a sigh that foreboded ill of these noisy professions.

Subsequent and quickly developed circumstances proved that his uneasiness was only too well founded. Rauber and his confederates were soon discovered in many most contemptible and utterly disgraceful acts. They were thieves; they were liars; they were perjurers; and they cared no more for the interests of all the good and honest people, than Wutherich had cared for the lives and souls of his poor people in the years that were past, and we could easier recount all of that bad man's misconduct than tell of all the mischief which they did.

But when accused of it, they pointed to the coat they wore, well knowing that it was the symbol of purity and truth; and tried to drown the voice of their accusers by shouting out the virtues of Freiheit, and how he had once whipped Wutherich, and done so much good, and made so many people happy.

This kind of talk deceived a great many people, who could not and would not believe that these men who wore that coat and made so much of Freiheit's virtues were really as bad as others said they were; and so they were allowed, for a long time, to go

on undisturbed, and drew a great many good men into their bad ways, and corrupted every department of the public service, until it seemed as if truth and justice was nowhere to be found.

And still the people were blind to the truth, and really thought that in keeping these men in their places they were honoring Freiheit and maintaining his principles; while the truth was, Freiheit was weeping at home for shame and rage at those who wore his coat and pretended to represent him. At last when my grandfather could endure it no longer, he called us all about him, and said:

"My children, you see this coat, which I have worn so long." He could hardly speak for his emotions, but went on: "I have loved that coat very much indeed. It is more to me than just simply a coat. It reminds me of my sorrow and joy—of my struggles and triumphs. I wore it when to wear it was considered a disgrace; and I have lived to see it more honored than any other coat ever was before." The old man fairly hugged it to his heart, but then said: "But I have come to feel that I must put it out of my sight; yes, more than that, I will burn it up, for after all it is only a coat and I can get another: for men have dishonored it, and to-day it hides more shame and wrong, I fear, than it has ever sheltered good. I will no longer cherish or allow myself to love an object which has come to mean something so contrary to my name and nature; so hateful to all good men and so forgetful of God."

And then with trembling hand but sure purpose, he cast it into the fire. I involuntarily sprang to rescue it, but he caught me and held me back, saying: "Nay, my son, it is better so. I know you loved it too, and I was glad once that you were not ashamed of it or of me, when all men reviled it; but if you still love what once it stood for, as I think you do, you will let it burn."

I could not, if I would, describe the heaviness of heart with which I saw its woolly fibers kink and consume in the flame; but

I comforted myself with my grandfather's words, that it was "only a coat after all."

My grandfather got a new coat, and this time he had it colored red; "for," said he, "there will come a very hot fire into the midst of these fellows before we have done with them, and, God willing, I will start such a blaze as will burn both them and all the coats on their backs, to the blackest cinders."

Well, do you think that Rauber and those fellows changed their coats at once? If you do, you are mistaken. The time had not come yet. They said to themselves, "The most of the people have entirely forgotten Freiheit by this time; or if they have not entirely forgotten him, they have forgotten, if they ever knew, what kind of a man he really is." And so they went blindly on in their own way, and I must confess that what they said seemed to be almost literally true. The red coat attracted some attention, and the people laughed a good deal at it; and the newspapers made sport of it, and called old Freiheit a fool, and only a few sympathized with him, and no one came out in exactly the same color. Once a few men declared together that they would adopt Freiheit's color, and called a great meeting at which every man was to be dressed in red: but instead of that they came in every shade of brown and black, and even a few of the regular old wool, which they drew over the people's eyes until everybody was either blind or mad; and they all went home again feeling that they had made fools of themselves. Then the wearers of the old coat were more jubilant than ever, and felt sure that the wool could always be drawn over the people's eyes; and went on with their shameless conduct, more bold than ever: at which my grandfather was so much distressed, that he took to his bed and his life was felt to be in great danger. He lingered along, however, some months after that, a weak and doubtful existence; only sometimes he would rally a little and then sink almost away, and we would think he was really gone.

Day and night we watched with him, and never left his side for a moment; and it seemed as if nothing but our constant attentions

kept him alive at all. We scarce dared to take our eyes off from him, lest while we turned away he should breathe his last. But one night there was a great illumination and fire-works, and a great procession, and cannons fired, and men hurrahing—the Lord only knows at what—and we all ran to the window to look out.

Well, there was Rauber, seated on a splendid horse gaily adorned with ribbons, and bands of music and companies of soldiers; and riding by his side, and following in his train, were Usurpator and Verrathes, leaders of those who clung to the old coat and hid all manner of villainy beneath its righteous color, and a host of their friends and followers, who seemed content to follow like a pack of fools or dogs, and walk in the mud through which their horses splashed, and shout themselves hoarse, or do any other absurd and servile thing for their pompous and shameless masters. And standing at our gate was Wutherich, one among a few who looked upon this spectacle with shame written on his face, and speaking angry words about it, while Freiheit lay dying in his own home, and no one caring enough about him to stop this idle rush and still their noisy clamor that was speeding his death.

But it was a great display—a long procession and a glittering pageant; and when it was past, it was near morning. Then we hurried back to my grandfather's bedside, and were there stricken with unutterable remorse and sorrow, for my grandfather, my dear grandfather Freiheit was dead! How we mourned for him in secret and sorrow, I need not tell; but as soon as it was light, and while the weary paraders were straggling home, we went out and published the news, which ran like wildfire, and spread consternation everywhere.

"Freiheit is dead! Freiheit is dead!" was uttered everywhere in subdued and frightened accents; and all at once men knew that one who was great, and good, and precious beyond price, had gone out from among them.

With broken hearts and tearful eyes they crowded about our house to look upon him; and old men told how fair he once was, how strong of limb and true of heart.

Women wept over his remains; and men who had sat on his lap in their childhood, rent the air with agonizing wails of sorrow at his departure. Young men and children, who scarce realized their loss, looked on in dumb wonder; and, from afar off, Rauber and his associates conducted themselves for a little time with considerate prudence.

"We must not press upon the people now," they said; "but in a few days we will dazzle them again with a glittering show, and they will forget all about it. But Freiheit *is* dead, and it is a jolly thing for us, too, that he is." And then they drank some wine, and smacked their lips with satisfaction, and settled themselves in comfortable luxuriance to smoke the choicest and most expensive cigars, bought with the people's money! They soon drove out in elegant carriages, drawn by noble horses—more noble than those they drew,—and bowed benignly to the people whose money paid the cost! They lived in stately mansions, and had hundreds of men at work to build greater still, while poor men toiled and children cried for food, to furnish all their splendor!

"Freiheit is dead!" Again and again the few who realized it spoke the sad truth with broken-hearted wailing. "What shall we do without Freiheit?" they said; and we answered only, "What shall we do?" for our hearts were heavy, and our spirits crushed with sorrow. What, indeed, shall we do?

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